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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how a teacher makes sense of the uncertainties of the practice, situating teacher uncertainty in the field of teacher learning, knowledge, and decision making. Data collection involved two semi-structured, open-ended interviews that elicited narratives about one teacher's experiences with uncertainty. The teacher interviewed reflects on, interprets, and makes links across the narratives. The findings from the interview indicate uncertainty is experienced when making teacher decisions and deciding what the best decision to make is. Uncertainty relating to in-the-moment decisions, is distinguished from interactions with students, assessments, and anxiety associated with longer-term, preparatory decisions and plans. Four interrelated components of uncertainty became evident through the study's findings as well: uncertainty as linked to personal history; uncertainty as a developmental construct; uncertainty in connected knowing; and cultural de-valuing of connected knowing and uncertainty. While these components relate specifically to one teacher's experience of uncertainty and multidimensional experience of confusion in decision making, the study found that believing in one's own confidence and assurance in decision making grows as more teaching experience is gained, and hope evolves that the anxiety associated with long-term planning will diminish. Furthermore, the value of one's uncertainties can then be recognized. (Contains 43 references.) (SM)

## Developing a Positive Relationship to the Uncertainties of Teaching

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## Introduction

Looking back on the beginnings of her teaching career, Selma Wasserman (1999) declares, “I was entering a profession in which there are few, if any, clear-cut answers, a profession riddled with ambiguity and moral dilemmas that would make Soloman weep” (p. 466). Selma, like many other teachers, was beginning to recognize the ambiguities in her teaching and was searching for tools to help her “navigate the murky seas of uncertainty” (p. 464). Over time, she began to realize that her feverish and desperate search for the clear-cut answers she knew must be “out there, somewhere” was misguided. Instead, she began to appreciate that

...while there are no easy, clear-cut answers in teaching, there are decisions that teachers make; that in the presence of confusing and ambiguous issues, teachers search for appropriate courses of action, rather than resolution; that decisions are for better or for worse; that even in the best of times teachers may have to choose between several less-than-good alternatives; that many life problems cannot be solved. (p. 466)

The literature on teacher uncertainties suggests that Selma is not alone in coming to new understandings of her teaching and of uncertainty, and there is a growing body of research that recognizes and describes the uncertain nature of teaching (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Calderhead, 1987; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Floden & Clark, 1987; Hatch, 1999; Helsing, 2000; Jackson, 1968, 1986; Lipsky, 1980; Lortie, 1975; McDonald, 1992; Nias, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1988; Webb & Ashton, 1987).

There is far less information or agreement, however, about what teachers do make and should make of the uncertainties they face. How do teachers feel about these uncertainties? Why might some teachers feel differently than others? Are these differences largely a function of character, depending, for example, on how open-minded,

wholehearted, and responsible a teacher is (as suggested in Dewey, 1986; Goodman, 1991; LaBoskey, 1993; Ross, 1990)? Could they relate to one's teaching philosophy, where teachers who view themselves primarily as learning coaches experience uncertainties differently than those who view themselves as subject matter experts? Like Selma, do teachers' relationships to their uncertainties qualitatively change with time and experience?

In this paper, I explore how one teacher, Mary Schawtz (a pseudonym), makes sense of the uncertainties of her practice, and I consider them in the larger context of her ways of knowing and decision making. In using the term "way of knowing," I refer to the structure, shape and complexity of Mary's knowing (her developmental capacities) as well as to the contents or style of her knowing (the topics she discusses and the preferences or values she brings to these topics). I refer to the cognitive features of her knowing as well as to more affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal features. I also choose this term because it was first coined and has grown popular from its use in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), a framework I rely on here for a good deal of my analysis and interpretation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I situate teacher uncertainty in the field of teacher learning, knowledge and decision making. However, since the literature described above has demonstrated that teachers' understanding of and responses to uncertainties vary considerably, it is important to understand teacher learning, knowledge and decision making in similarly broad ways. Accordingly, I embrace a perspective of teacher knowing as complex,

personal and practical (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1999; Elbaz, 1983, 1991; Grumet, 1987; Lampert, 1985).

In this view, teacher knowledge is seen as holistic, including and integrating thought and action, cognitive and affective concerns, arising from teachers' individual personal and professional experiences. Researchers accepting this view of teaching emphasize teacher knowledge as shaped by and evident in the daily particulars of teachers' work. It is in their understanding of and response to these concerns that teachers integrate many types of knowledge. They draw upon practical knowledge including their knowledge about students, instructional techniques, classroom management strategies, the school structure, and the culture of the surrounding community. They also integrate more theoretical forms of knowledge into these understandings, including knowledge of subject matter, child development, learning and social theory. Finally, they bring their personal knowledge to bear, including knowledge about their own identities, their values, beliefs and personal history. In practice, all parts of a teacher are necessarily related and therefore relevant to what she knows and how she acts; the "parts of herself are not separable, one from another, the way they might be if we think of them [in theoretical terms] as names for categories of persons or cultural ideals" (Lampert, 1985, p. 184).

This view of teacher knowledge as personal, practical and complex, has allowed me to privilege the teacher's descriptions of her understandings and experiences. I have used these descriptions to shape the theories I have built, rather than using theories of uncertainty that have been delineated in the literature to shape my study.

## Methods

My theoretical framework has implications for how I have collected and analyzed data. Viewing teacher knowledge, learning and decision making as complex, personal and practical, emphasizes the individuality of the teacher and the inter-relatedness of a teacher's experiences. To varying degrees and in different ways, researchers adopting this perspective have found that teachers' stories about their work have provided a methodology that enables them to address these priorities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1999; Elbaz, 1991; Grumet, 1987; Lampert, 1985). Stories integrate, rather than dissect, the various realms of teachers' lived experiences. In placing importance on the ways that a teacher combines her own sense of reasoning, agency, imagination, and emotion, narrative analysis has also helped me understand the personal and practical knowledge teachers bring to these experiences.

This paper is essentially a case study, based on two semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Mary. In these interviews, I have explicitly elicited narratives about Mary's experiences of uncertainties. I have also asked her to reflect on and interpret her narratives, as well as to make links across the narratives she has shared with me. The interviews therefore cover issues such as Mary's experiences of uncertainty in her teaching; her interpretations of these experiences and her relationship to these uncertainties; the internal and external dimensions that contribute to her relationship to uncertainties; and the history and development of this relationship.

I read the narratives for insight into Mary's conceptualizations of uncertainty; the ways that she responds to uncertainties; the factors in her work life and inner life that contribute to the differences in her reactions; and the ways that these factors interrelate in

her work. I have also analyzed the ways that Mary structured her narratives, examining how her stories make use of or disrupt narrative conventions. I am interested in the extent to which the construction of the story mirrors or disconfirms its content. For example, stories designed to provide neat resolutions, morals or final outcomes, might suggest something about the way their narrator experiences teaching situations which disrupt her sense of her teaching knowledge as neat, resolved and orderly. Other structural features I focused on in my analysis include the selection of events that Mary incorporated into or left out of the story; the ordering of these events; characterization; causal linkages; and linguistic signals marking the beginnings, ends, turning points, or climaxes of a narrative.

I believe that the validity of my interpretations comes from several aspects of this study. First, my methods have enabled me to collect rich data, detailed enough to provide a complex picture of one teacher's experiences of uncertainty. Furthermore, I believe I have strengthened my interpretations by remaining deliberately alert to discrepant evidence that cannot be accounted for by my operating interpretations. Through the course of my research, I have also attempted to understand how my own biases and interaction with the setting influence my research. To do so, I wrote memos focusing on my own role in the setting and my interactions with Mary and other individuals in the setting. I also periodically asked Mary during and at the end of the study to tell me ways that my research has impacted her thinking and teaching.

### **Mary Schawtz**

Mary Schawtz has been teaching for seven years and is currently working at Harrison Charter School, a mid-sized school in suburban Massachusetts. Mary earned

first a college degree as a dance major and subsequently earned a Masters of Fine Arts degree, also in dance. She spent several years cleaning houses to support herself while she continued to train and perform as a dancer. Finally, she decided to apply for positions teaching dance. After taking on several short-term, part-time jobs, she was hired at a prep school to teach dance, ESL, and later English classes. Deciding that she was growing frustrated with the culture of the boarding school, she applied and was hired for her current position at Harrison Charter. At 40, she has taught at Harrison for three years, first as a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, and now as a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Arts and Humanities teacher.

### **Mary as a Dancer, Choreographer, and Teacher**

To explore a medium, to work with it, to try to express something seen or felt or heard is to come to understand, on some level, that visions are made real when they are transformed into perceptual realities and given intelligible form... What is important is the effort to define a vision and to work on giving it expression. An understanding of the struggle, a sense of having been inside it even for a moment, cannot but feed into an awareness of the privileged realities artists create. To know how to attend to such realities is to open oneself to altogether new visions, to unsuspected experiential possibilities. (Greene, 1978, p. 187)

Mary thinks of herself first as a dancer, choreographer and teacher, and in the dance world, these identities are very much intertwined. Mary's expertise in dance is based on about "fifteen years of being in [dance] class and having [dance] teachers." She emphasizes that dancers do not separate their education and training in dance from their performance careers. As a dancer, she explains, "You go to classes for your entire life. You go to class and have teachers..."

Furthermore, dance teachers are not likely to have studied to be teachers in the ways that other teachers have, by taking classes in Schools of Education. As Mary explains, the teaching of dance as an "oral tradition," one that "gets passed on because



everyone is having teachers all the time and learning from the teachers about teaching as well as about dancing.” Dancers therefore learn to teach by studying the models they have in their dance teachers.

Mary describes the experience of artistic creation as one that requires risk-taking and a kind of openness to forms of expression that are new, not yet imagined and embodied. What this means is that the dancer/choreographer is “always working at the edge of [her] level, the edge of [her] capability. It’s always new territory. It’s always unbroken territory.” While the process of creativity might begin with some basic ideas and sense of direction about what the dance will look like, these ideas must also be suspended. The artist must get lost “in the chaos or in the clouds” from which the dance can then begin to emerge and take shape. In performing the completed work, the dancer then looks back and considers what effects her piece have had on herself and on her audience. In evaluating the success of the new creation, the artist considers how the dance might be changed and strengthened and how it might inspire new works, new growth.

These experiences of artistic creation form the core of Mary’s identity of herself as a knower. It is this way of knowing and being in the world that she brings to her work as an Arts and Humanities teacher, and it is this expression of this way of knowing that allows her to feel a sense of joy and passion in her work.

Some people get into education through the idea of wanting to teach, and some people get in from teaching what they know how to do. And I [am] teaching what I [know] how to do... Because there is something wonderful about teaching what you know. There really is something that you can’t substitute, that you can’t replace, about teaching something that you really, really know deeply and understand.

However, teaching dance is only a small part of the subject matter Mary teaches at Harrison Charter. Because electives are dependent on student enrollment, there are semesters in which she teaches no dance classes due to a lack of student interest. The majority of her work is as an Arts and Humanities teacher, teaching an integrated curriculum that combines English, Social Studies and the Arts. Within this curriculum, there is a particular emphasis placed on English and Social Studies subject matter and skills, and Mary describes the way arts are studied as being somewhat “artificial” and “superficial.”

At Harrison, teachers are expected to be “generalists,” meaning that their role with any subject matter is primarily to guide their students to ask good questions, identify ways of exploring those questions, and come to new understandings which are open to on-going revision. Mary understands the value inherent this type of teaching model.

And philosophically, I was always somewhat comfortable with [the idea that teachers should be generalists] because I was always able to say, “This is about student inquiry. This is about being in this project, all of us together. We’re all learning together and delving and finding out and exploring together. And I don’t need to be the authority who fills the kids’ minds with knowledge that I have.” So, in principle, I see the value of it.

In fact, however, Mary’s expertise as a dancer, and her familiarity with artistic ways of knowing make her somewhat skeptical of the generalist approach to teaching. She becomes most aware of the limitations of this philosophy when the curriculum includes some attention to the arts.

Last year, we were studying Mexico, and we talked about mural painting as an art form and its history and the context. And we had [the students] think about themes in Mexican culture and create their own personal mural on brown paper that sort of said something about these themes. The art teacher came in and taught [the teachers] a series of workshops that we were later supposed to teach the kids. And he would have us do process work and then have a crit. session. And then do some more process and have a crit. session. And he talked with us as

well about how we assess these, what we're looking for, and the elements we're trying to work with the kids on. So, he was entrusting us, you know, to teach his area of expertise. And training us as best he could, but it's almost insulting to the art form to think that you could train someone so quickly to not just be able to see and do themselves, but to teach someone else.

I also felt like – this is a snotty thing I'm going to say – that because I have a background in some art form, I was more competent than someone who [has a background in] Social Studies. Even with an art form that's not mine. I could talk to the kids about process. What does it mean to look at something you've done and ask yourself not, "Why did I do that?" but 'What's the effect of what I did?' I've done that process. I've done that thinking. You know, you can't do the checklist thing.

So. Did the kids grow from it and learn and get a lot out of it? Yeah, I think they did. But I also think – I think it's a fine line between [the good parts of that and] cheapening it and really not teaching them respect for it.

Just as Mary recognizes the value of having arts teachers who are specialists in their fields and who can bring unique ways of knowing and thinking to their work, she is also aware of the ways that other subjects and ways of knowing feel unfamiliar and sometimes awkward to her. She describes how strange it is for her to be teaching American History, and that while she can be comfortable exploring facts, dates, cultural artifacts and historical documents with students, she also feels that a history teacher can "have kids learn how to [think about these things] the way a historian would." In relying on additional contextual knowledge and techniques of teaching history, the history teacher brings a certain richness to the subject that she, Mary, does not.

Because Mary's pedagogical knowledge is tied to her experiences studying dance, she also finds the ways that other teachers think and talk about their teaching to be often strange and foreign to her. At Harrison, teachers often work collaboratively, and there are many opportunities to participate in team teaching, collaborative planning, and classroom research, as well as reflective practice groups. Neither dance nor her

experiences teaching in a prep school have prepared her for this type of deliberate and institutionally-supported type of work.

And then you come to Harrison, and everyone is [working collaboratively] and everyone is talking about your “practice.” I hadn’t heard that word used. I thought it was about yoga, you know? (laughs) And everyone is trying to get better at it, and everyone is talking all the time about teaching. And all these people went to Ed School. And I don’t know, you’ve been in prep school for two years, and you just kind of look around and go, “All right, I guess now I have to learn how to teach.”

One aspect of teacher planning that she finds particularly surprising and distasteful is the idea that teachers should have a uniform process for writing and sharing their lesson plans.

In all my years in prep school, I never had to write out a lesson plan. And I never ever saw or wrote a piece of paper with the word “Objectives” at the top. Ever! I got to Harrison and [was] planning on the team. But, all of a sudden, in our planning meetings, someone says, “Well, I really think that we should have some frameworks. For instance, when we write lesson plans, we should have a template. And it should start with ‘Objectives.’”

And I’m going (sighs), “Give me a break!” I don’t like to think about my objectives when I write a lesson plan.

Mary connects her aversion to this standardized way of planning to her ways of thinking and knowing that come from her creative and artistic background.

It’s not coincidence that I don’t like to write “Objectives” at the top of the page because there is something about the process [of teaching] that it is not fully listy, left brain, in the box, orderly. It *falls* into order. And you have to be able to look at it and fix it once it’s out there and articulate the order and all of that. You have to be rigorous. But before you get rigorous, there’s a level at which you have to sort of spew. Or trust that there’s some reason that you’re doing this next or doing this now. And you don’t know what the reason is yet, but you will. And it makes it hard to plan as a team. It really does make it sometimes hard to plan with a team because, I mean, to some extent, everyone is working that way but to varying extents.

And lots of teachers – not just teachers who’ve been artists – go into class and throw out their lesson plan and do something else entirely. Or, sort of improvise or follow an instinct or an intuition. That’s something lots of teachers do, but I

think there's a way in which I value that, that kind of process. Where I'm sort of used to it, or there's something that I'm putting into it, or some way that I'm approaching it that's the same way that I would approach creative things.

As I listened to Mary describe her background and her teaching, I was aware that I was feeling a strong sense of curiosity about her ideas and an empathy with her sense of not quite fitting into the culture of Harrison and the work of teaching. For most of the interview, I felt drawn in by her words, and together, we seemed to be coming to a deepening sense of her own thinking and knowing. But when she spoke about her scorn for lesson planning and identifying objectives for her lessons, I experienced a new sense of distance, disconnection and confusion. I hadn't expected her to say something that sounded a bit shocking and irresponsible to me. My initial feeling was that she must be wrong, or possibly she was overstating her position.

If I could have paused long enough to articulate my reactions, I might have argued that carefully and purposefully planning lessons is at the center of thoughtful teaching. All teaching and lesson planning should be guided by a clear sense of what students should be able to know and do. But I didn't actually pause very long, and I didn't voice my confusion to Mary. Instead, I tried to smooth over that moment. I asked a new question, shifting direction slightly to cover other subjects. The sense of connection and interest I had previously felt in the interview began to return, and I again felt drawn in.

After transcribing and reading through the interview, I puzzled over her words, returning to this issue of lesson planning and setting objectives. I considered these words in the context of the other stories, ideas, and thoughts she had shared with me. What I began to see was that the reason for my shock was that Mary had not only called the idea

of lesson planning and setting objectives into question, she was actually challenging a whole approach to thinking about teaching, an approach that is taught and passed on through schools of education to teachers, an approach that I had not, until now, questioned deeply.

### **Separate and Connected Ways of Teaching**

In our interviews, I asked Mary to talk about difficult teaching dilemmas she has faced and to describe how she thinks about these dilemmas.

In the moment, I'm just wanting something to work for this kid or work for this room. I don't know if I have underlying principles anymore, like either, "Order must be maintained at all times," or, "Disorder is fine, if it's productive disorder," or, you know, "Hands off – let the kids flounder." I mean, I care about things, but I don't confuse the way I want the world to be with reality. I mean, when I do, I'm in trouble. (laughs)

[But there is] always sort of an underlying idea in my head that this about the world. School is not some other thing. That this is about people interacting with people and skills that we need to learn in order not to destroy our species.

I mean, you know I did make that rule in one of my classes here. They're constantly insulting each other. And it's usually in joke, but I mean, I could just tell that one of these days it was going to hurt, if it wasn't already. And I said, "Rule! I don't care how easily the person's taking it. I don't care if they know that you're just joking. I don't care if they're even participating. I know this is all in fun. I don't care. No more insulting in this class." And I made it a rule.

But, yeah, [mostly] it's situational. And what's underlying it for me is something bigger than I could make into a teaching principle. And it's more about questions for me about the world, and you know, whether it's about focus or discipline or whatever, I've seen functional classrooms at all ends of the spectrum. So, I know there's not a right and a wrong. I usually think there must be a right and a wrong, and I just don't know what they are, but I'm learning more and more and more that there's not. But that doesn't make me trust my judgment. I rethink a lot.

Studying this description of her own decision making, I began to notice patterns in her thinking. Mary's attention to the changing, contextual nature of decision making seemed to run counter to the idea of universally applicable teaching principles and the

objectives of lesson planning. Her sense of openness to different types of teaching and learning (“There’s not a right and wrong”) and to change and revision (“I rethink a lot”) contradicts the idea of a more certain, predictable, definitive stance. Where she seems most convicted is in her sense of the relational dynamics of the classroom, emphasizing the importance that no one is hurt, that no one is insulted.

This pattern of thought bears a strong resemblance to the descriptions of “connected knowing,” first described by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule in *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986). In this book, which traces the different shapes of women’s psychological development, the authors identify two distinct orientations that they see among a group of women they interviewed. The group of women were those who use “procedural knowledge,” and they include those who have an orientation toward “separate knowing” and those who have an orientation toward “connected knowing.” In identifying Mary with connected knowing, I am actually making two claims. The first claim, that she uses procedural knowledge, is a claim about her developmental capacities, the shape and structure of her knowing. The second claim, that she is primarily a connected knower, is a claim about the style, contents, or type of her knowing.

While Belenky and her colleagues do not in fact claim that their developmental model illustrates a series of stages of growth that happen in a predictable sequence, they do describe procedural knowing as a perspective taken by women who had “abandoned” prior perspectives (subjectivism and absolutism) “in favor of reasoned reflection” (1986, p. 88). These women had all experienced a challenge to their former ways of knowing

and, in response, began looking not for helpful answers, but for “techniques for constructing answers” (p. 92).

Procedural knowing is characterized by a capacity to see truth as something that is “not immediately accessible,” but as something that requires “careful observation and analysis” (p. 94). At previous points in their lives, these women might have relied on experts and authorities to determine what is right and wrong or simply asserted the fundamental correctness of an opinion without subjecting it to scrutiny. However, these women now recognize a new complexity in the world, believing that the content of a decision matters less than the methods and procedures one uses to arrive at an answer. They are able to consider a topic from multiple perspectives and can try on these perspectives in order to evaluate the suitability of each. Procedural knowing can therefore be considered comparable to the Reflective Thinking Stages of King and Kitchener’s (1994) Reflective Judgment model and the Self-Authoring Order of Consciousness in Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994) model of adult development.

Returning to Mary’s description of her teaching beliefs and problem solving process, I see indications that she has developed and relies on procedural knowing. For example, in asserting that she no longer believes there are right or wrong answers in teaching but that there are many types of good classrooms and good teaching, she rejects more absolutist or purely subjectivist forms of reasoning. In asserting her own theories about the importance of teaching what one knows best, she also demonstrates that she is not identified with the majority opinion expressed by the school administration and teachers. While she can take on that perspective and understand the reasonableness of it,



she is also able to compare it with her self-generated values and call that perspective into question.

Connecting knowing is a stylistic preference evident among some women who use procedural knowledge. These women see the most trustworthy knowledge as that which comes from their own experience and therefore conceive of truth as something personal, particular, “intimate rather than impersonal, relatively informal and unstructured rather than bound by more or less explicitly formal rules” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 114). These descriptions seem to mirror Mary’s accounts of her decision making as “situational,” rather than as based on universal “underlying principles,” suggesting an orientation toward context and the unique particularities of a situation and away from a more explicitly formal rule orientation.

Connected knowing is contrasted with separate knowing, which refers to an orientation toward doubt and critical thinking. As described in *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986), the separate knower assumes a more adversarial stance toward new information and ideas, examining them immediately for possible flaws of argument or logic. Argument and debate are often considered appropriate methods of to learn and converse. Relying on impersonal procedures and reason that exclude one’s feelings and beliefs, ideas are assessed according to ideals of pragmatism and tough-mindedness. Separate knowing is an orientation that is often exhibited by academic authorities and rewarded in competitive environments. It is “a game that has belonged traditionally to boys—the game of impersonal reason” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 104).

Preferring empathy and trust (to doubt and suspicion), connected knowers prioritized concerns about upholding relationships and expressing care for others. In

constructing their portrait of the connected knowing, Belenky and her colleagues refer to Carol Gilligan's (1982) depiction of women's moral reasoning, in which a clear voice of the ethic of "responsibility and care" is heard. This voice rejects the ideals of blind justice, impartiality, and the application of universal, abstract rules and principles to arrive at formulaic solutions. These ideals are among those valued and more evident among male voices and models of morality. Instead, the voice of responsibility and care emphasizes the importance of inductive reasoning that takes context and the particularities of individual experience into account. A morality of care focuses on maintaining connection among people, understanding the relationship as primary to the individual.

Mary also foregrounds concerns about relationships, showing most certainty about her sense of how students should treat each other, insisting that they are not allowed to use insults, even as jokes because of the likelihood that someone could be hurt. She recalls an experience when she became aware that four 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls were being "brutal" to another girl in the school. Even when Mary intervened, she remembers feeling shocked at how "mean and resistant" the girls were, how reluctant they were to talk about or reconsider their behavior. This determined display of cruelty is quite disturbing to Mary, and she describes feeling "genuinely in pain... genuinely struggling" as she tried to understand and resolve the situation. The incident strikes at her deepest beliefs, causing her to question:

Is this human nature? Are all human beings as brutal and cruel as 7<sup>th</sup> graders? Is this what we all really are under the skin? Are we all 7<sup>th</sup> graders underneath [our] good behavior?

and to assert:

...This is about the world. School is not some other thing. This is about people interacting with people and skills that we need to learn in order not to destroy our species.

She finds her own classroom decision making to be noticeably easier when she already has developed strong relationships with the students involved.

[When I have to make a hard decision,] having any prior relationship with the kids helps... because they're just receptive in a different way than they would be if they didn't know me, and I feel comfortable with them in a way that I wouldn't if I didn't have a relationship with them. It's true what they say that really everything about teaching is just about relationship.

Connected knowers also bring this sense of empathy and relationship to their understanding of ideas and objects. While the concept of relating to an idea or object may seem necessarily one-sided, in deeply understanding it, we may actually come to feel that "this object-other has responded to us" (Noddings, 1984, p. 169, cited in Belenky et al., 1986, p. 102). In this way, "the 'it' is transformed into a 'thou,' and the 'I' enters into relationship with the thou" (Clinchy, 1996, p. 221). Clinchy recognizes this type of thinking among some scientists' descriptions of their work.

The biologist Barbara McClintock says, in words that have grown familiar, that you must have the patience to hear what the corn "has to say to you" and the openness "to let it come to you" (Keller, 1983a, p. 198), and the pseudonymous biochemist portrayed by June Goodfield in *An Imagined World* says, "If you really want to understand about a tumor you've got to be a tumor" (Goodfield, 1991/1994, p. 226). (Clinchy, 1996, p. 221)

The openness and self-immersion in ideas and situations that is depicted here parallels Mary's descriptions of the more artistic and creative way she thinks about her teaching and planning. Allowing herself to get lost "in the chaos or clouds" enables her to remain open to the complex dynamics of the moment, and her teaching can be shaped by and responsive to these dynamics. As she teaches, she feels she is "exploring and

trying to understand the situation and trying to *be in the situation*" (emphasis mine). In doing so, she makes space for new perspectives, for the unexpected.

I have a class right now, and they get off track. They giggle a lot. They talk too much. But they're all engaged in the material we're talking about, every one of them, at some point. They all have the book open, and they're all noticing things in it. And they're all realizing things. And if I ask a question, at some point in the class, each one of them will answer in a way that's relevant and text-based. And I spend a lot of time saying, "SH!" because you know, they've gotten on some tangent, or something struck them funny.

And they're like, suddenly they're talking about Puff Daddy. We're reading *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. And they're talking about Puff Daddy and giggling. But, actually, with Puff Daddy, it was cool that they said that. Because they were actually making a good analogy. And they thought they were just being goofy, and I could say, "Yes, that is exactly the analogy, and..." So, I think [the class] works [even though] they are being a pain in the butt. They are like, really giggly, really hard to focus. And the reason it can work is because it's such a small class. I can keep reigning them back, and we can keep getting text-based again.

Mary's openness to her students' perspectives allows her to connect their own thoughts to the material they are studying. Looking for strengths, rather than weaknesses, in students' thinking, she uses her imagination to understand how they might be thinking. She uses empathy to enter into their frames of mind. This stance does not mean that she will necessarily accept and agree with any and all ideas advanced by another. As a connected knower, "Believing' is a *procedure* that guides her interaction with other minds; it is not the *result* of that interaction." (Clinchy, 1996, p. 209). While Mary might therefore adopt an affirming or confirming stance to understand an idea, she is also able to compare that idea with her own and evaluate its merits according to her beliefs. I see evidence of this in the fact that Mary can understand the reasoning for why teachers should be generalists, but she can also contrast that perspective with her own stance

which emphasizes the value of teachers' expertise with particular subjects and ways of knowing.

### **Mary's Uncertainty in her Teaching and Decision Making**

In making these teaching decisions, Mary often experiences a sense of uncertainty about what she feels would be the best decision for her to make. She describes this uncertainty in terms of a lack of trust in the decisions she must make quickly, on her feet, in the moment that she is teaching.

I don't trust my decision making. I mean, I can look back and say, "That was the right decision"...when I talk it through to myself, but in the moment I [have] no idea if it [is] the right decision. I never do in the moment! I never do! I'm never sure of myself!

She links some of this uncertainty to the fact that she is usually teaching material that is not very familiar to her. In contrast, she does not feel the same amount of uncertainty when teaching dance.

[I feel] much less uncertainty [when I'm teaching dance]. Even if I don't really know how to teach dance, I feel like I do. So, I don't experience uncertainty. I know when I've made a mistake. Like yesterday, in my dance class, in the last ten minutes, I threw a combination at them that was way too complicated. But I knew I was doing it! I knew I'd done it! I didn't have any uncertainty. It was like, "Oh yeah, that was a big mistake." And I don't really mind that I did it because I know! Yeah, confidence helps. And in my case, confidence comes from knowing something fairly well.

Here, in describing the confidence she feels when teaching dance, Mary implies that there is also a link between her sense of uncertainty and a lack of confidence in her judgment.

Furthermore, she distinguishes between two kinds of discomfort she experiences in her decision making. She associates uncertainty with "in-the-moment decisions, interactions with kids, assessments." But she also experiences anxiety, which she

associates with longer-term and preparatory sorts of decisions and plans, such as planning a “curriculum, preparing, the stuff that [she does] ahead of time.”

Interestingly, Mary’s discomfort with in-the-moment decision making appears as part of our interview process. In our first interview, she related an experience of uncertainty that she was currently facing in her teaching. As she described the situation, she would remember additional information that she hadn’t accounted for in her first telling of the story. She therefore seems to be having difficulty framing the experience and giving it structure in order to communicate it clearly. She does not immediately convey what is uncertain about it, what is at stake for her, or how she might respond. The relevant parts of the story emerge in a somewhat halting manner, after pauses, false starts, corrections and clarifications. Aware that she is having difficulty, she tells me, “I wish I could describe it better,” and then later, “That wasn’t a very clear description. I wish you could be there to see it.” Similar to her frustration in making the decision, she seems also frustrated by her difficulty in framing and conveying the dilemma. The fragmented structure of her narrative shows me how her uncertainty involves a concern not just about what to do but also one of how to construct and represent the dilemma so as to examine it and communicate it to me.

When we meet for the second interview, after reading the transcript of her first interview, she expresses her disgust with what seems to her like inarticulate and garbled conversation. “I read it,” she tells me, “and shuddered.” I reason that all transcripts have a similar quality to them and point out that my own words include many missteps and stumbling attempts at questions. When she seems unconvinced and mentions the transcript again later in the interview, I begin to see a connection between the confusion

and dissatisfaction she describes in the transcript and her dissatisfaction with the transcript itself, a dissatisfaction in the fact that she feels she has not represented her confusion in a clear, eloquent manner.

Later, now with both transcripts in front of me, I look for more information about her uncertainty. I want to understand more about its nature and structure. As I read and reflect, I begin to identify differences in the source of and shape of the uncertainties that run through her thinking. I recognize four interrelated components that help me add additional dimension and texture to this conceptualization of uncertainty.

### *Uncertainty as Linked to her History as a Dancer*

Part of the uncertainty Mary experiences stems directly from her history as a dancer and her familiarity with that way of knowing. As is related earlier in this paper, Mary describes dance and choreography as an art form, in which the artist is “always working at the edge of [her] level, the edge of [her] capability. It’s always new territory.” As a result, she reports feeling more uncertain about dancing and about herself as a dancer than she feels as a teacher. As a dancer, she is often “fraught and laden with self-doubt,” “living in fear,” and because she has danced for so long, these feelings have become habitual, expected, a regular part of her inner life. “I wouldn’t have been a choreographer,” she reasons, “if I wasn’t addicted to feeling panicked and out of my element and uncertain.”

### *Uncertainty as a Developmental Construct*

I also recognize a developmental dimension to Mary’s uncertainty. As someone who has cultivated the ability to use procedural knowledge, Mary does not subscribe to the idea that truth is immediately accessible and that there are simple and straight-

forward right or wrong answers in teaching. In Kitchener and King's (1994) model, this means that there is a fundamental recognition that knowledge is, by nature, uncertain and problematic; that many problems humans face are inherently ambiguous; and that in order to come to a reasoned decision, we develop an ability to judge the reasonableness of any one position according to available evidence and our tools of inquiry.

Mary's uncertainty in decision making is therefore less about finding a kind of right answer that has already been identified by experts or authorities, that exists independent to her own teaching, or that applies to all situations she faces. Instead, her uncertainty centers on the procedures she uses to reach her decisions. Her focus is in determining if these procedures are dependable, reasonable, trustworthy. This focus is apparent in her description (quoted earlier in this paper) of the confidence she feels teaching dance.

[I feel] much less uncertainty [when I'm teaching dance]. Even if I don't really know how to teach dance, I feel like I do. So, I don't experience uncertainty. I know when I've made a mistake. Like yesterday, in my dance class, in the last ten minutes, I threw a combination at them that was way too complicated. But I knew I was doing it! I knew I'd done it! I didn't have any uncertainty. It was like, "Oh yeah, that was a big mistake." And I don't really mind that I did it because I know! Yeah, confidence helps. And in my case, confidence comes from knowing something fairly well.

It is clear that Mary is not necessarily claiming that she makes better decisions while teaching dance ("I made a mistake") or that she teaching knowledge of dance is complete ("Even if I don't really know how to teach dance..."). She is not, therefore, focusing her energy on the content or outcome of the particular decisions themselves. What she does claim is that because she knows about dance, at least "fairly well," she has confidence in her ability to judge her own decisions and feel comfortable with that



judgment. She focuses on the procedures and methods she uses, and it is when she can evaluate them as sound and trustworthy that she does not experience uncertainty.

### *Uncertainty in Connected Knowing*

I see some degree of Mary's uncertainty as related to her orientation to connected knowing. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule associate connected knowing with a "nonjudgmental stance" toward the world. That is, while these women can and do make judgments, they prefer to operate in a different mode, one that is primarily concerned with understanding something or someone which they might initially disagree with or disapprove of (p. 117). This reluctance to make judgments can often be seen by others as "evidence of passivity or absence of agency" (p. 117), but is instead an intentional activity, an exercise of forbearance, patience, and waiting, a refrain from attempts to control people and situations. It is an approach that is "questioning rather than assertive" (Belenky & Stanton, p. 79).

Again, these descriptions match those Mary provides, although unlike the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Mary considers her discomfort and disinclination to judge as a largely (although not completely) negative feature of her thinking.

I'm a slow thinker! ... I mean in hindsight I can say why something was the right or wrong decision. But, no I'm not kidding. I'm not a quick thinker on my feet. I answer the kids a lot with "Let me think about that."

I mean I'd love to be like [names another teacher]. Or, you know, any of these teachers who are (snaps fingers) quick on their feet and know right away what the answer is. I'd love that, but I'm just not.

I mean, often, I fear, it just looks like I have no control. And [that's] not good teaching.

I guess I'm glad that I don't have some sort of rigid sense of rules that have no meaning for me. I mean I guess I'm glad that I'm exploring and trying to understand the situation and trying to be in the situation. That's all good. But it's

too hard! (laughs) And you make a lot of mistakes and do a lot of stupid things. And I wish that I could, within a situation, be quicker on my feet and make a decision [and know] why I was making it in the instant.

In particular, she locates this ability to “be in the situation,” to connect intimately with ideas and experience, as one of the reasons for her anxiety and uncertainty. Even when she can intellectually realize that she will come to a decision, while she is deliberating, she is most connected to her feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.

[In one of my classes, the students] are supposed to do this final project. But I have no idea whether this entire semester has given them any foundation (knocks on table) on which to do this project. And I need to come up with a lesson plan that’s going to scaffold them and get them started on this project. And I need it by tomorrow. That’s anxiety.

You know that story about the little boy who loves the story about Pinocchio? Every night he asks his mother to read him the story of Pinocchio. And every single night, when Pinocchio is swallowed by the whale, the little boy starts to cry. And one night the mother says, “Why do you start to cry every single night? You’ve heard this story a hundred times, and you know that he’s going to come out.” And the boy says, “Yep. But he’s in there now!”

So, (laughs) I’m in there now. And the anxiety is about really not knowing. But I mean part of me knows because I do [know]. I always come up with curriculum; I always choreograph [the] dances. It’s the same with writing a paper when I was in college. It’s all the same. I know I’ll do it, in one part. But in the other part, I really don’t know that, [and somehow] it doesn’t help to know that [I will eventually do it]. I don’t know.

There’s uncertainty involved in the anxiety, too. There’s plenty of uncertainty mixed in with having to create a curriculum that you don’t know how to create. There’s lots of uncertainty.

In this way, Mary’s orientation to connected knowing incorporates experiences of uncertainty, even when she has a larger intellectual perspective that could serve to contradict that experience.

### *Cultural De-Valuing of Connected Knowing and Uncertainty*

Finally, I propose that there is a fourth component to Mary's uncertainty, which relates most directly to her lack of confidence and self-assurance about her decision making and ways of knowing. My proposition is that since Mary's orientation to connected knowing is one associated most commonly with a more female perspective, she experiences cultural messages and norms that devalue this stance.

In their chapter, "Inequality, Development, and Connected Knowing," Mary Belenky and Ann Stanton (2000) argue that women's socially prescribed task of caring for family members and for their broader communities allowed them to acquire particular types of relational knowledge. However, the devaluing of this socially prescribed role has meant that their knowledge has "remained largely ghettoized in the private world of the family," and that at times, the feminine tendency to dawn on emotional as well as cognitive experience, the particular as well as the universal "is simply not seen as involving thinking... reflection [or] reason" (p. 77).

In setting out to do her own work, Gilligan (1993) noticed that according to male models of moral reasoning and development, women's thinking was often categorized as immature, less developed. From this more traditional and commonly accepted perspective, the reluctance to assert universal ethical principles, the "very insistence on the limitations of such formulas for resolving human conflicts" meant that women's reasoning was often heard as "wishy-washy, as indecisive, as evasive, and naïve" (p. xxi)

The premium placed on decisiveness, judgment, and problem solving can also be found in the culture of education. In an article about teacher decision making, Magdalene Lampert (1985) reasons that many problems teachers face in their classrooms are

essentially unsolvable because they pit contradictory commitments against each other. A choice of action is unclear because choosing one commitment involves denying what may feel like an equally important alternative commitment, and so to choose results in loss. The problem cannot therefore be neatly solved, but instead, must be managed. This perspective on teachers' problem solving, however, is not one that is highly valued in our society.

There are, of course, many incentives for teachers and scholars to want to eliminate conflict and to think of classroom problems as solvable. If pedagogical problems could be separated one from another rather than entangled in a web of contradictory goals, then they could be solved in some sort of linear progression—shot down like ducks coming up in a row at a penny arcade. Thinking of one's job as figuring out how to live with a web of related problems that cannot be solved seems like an admission of weakness. Sorting out problems and finding solutions that will make them go away is certainly a more highly valued endeavor in our society. (Lampert, 1985, p. 193)

Larry Cuban comes to a similar conclusion. He describes how, in his work as an educator, he has faced dilemmas that go unrecognized and unexplored by many scholars and practitioners. He suggests that educational researchers ignore these kinds of pervasive moral ambiguities and instead, tend to ask questions for which they can easily find answers.

Americans think of problems as just waiting to be solved in a can-do, John Wayne spirit.... The common observation that Americans seek a cure for every disease, a tidy ending for every film, and a beautiful sunset after a troubled day has become a cliché. This culture prizes getting the job done, speedy and efficient technologies, and asking the basic question, Will it work? Acknowledging that many situations are unsolvable and require good-enough trade-offs goes against the cultural grain and creates guilt over failing to remedy problems. (Cuban, 1992, p. 7)

Thus, when I listen to Mary disparage her lack of confidence and poor decision making, I also listen with an ear to the ways she may be comparing her own ways of knowing with to an internalized standard of decision making that privileges an approach

more common among men. When this approach is assumed as the standard, the connected orientation appears only as less-than. Confidence is taken to signal validity and soundness of thought, which in turn can breed greater confidence in oneself. The connected knower's tendency to question what and how she knows can easily lead an individual to cultivate questions and doubts about her value and skill as a knower.

In considering how other teachers see her, Mary does imagine that she must look weaker, less-than. Her admiration for the ability to be decisive suggests that she also evaluates herself by this standard.

There's another teacher on the faculty, who, I know, thinks of me as like, the non-enforcer, the loosey-lacksy, one who lets kids do whatever they want... [She's] extremely strict. I really admire her. ...I wish I were more like her in a million ways. ...But at least I've been teaching long enough to know that I can't try to teach like other people do because it works for them. I've been through that. I know that that doesn't work.

Anyway, I turned 40, and I decided I really wanted to act my age, by which I meant, I want to act like I have a little more authority (laughs). I want to walk into a room and not assume that everyone but me knows what's going on. You know? And I want to convey this a little bit more. (laughs)

I mean, as a teacher I'm sure I do that more than lots of people already, but I don't do it as much perhaps as most teachers. I don't know, maybe I even do. But I think it does boil down to believing in yourself in the moment. I know this. Because I also have a performance background. So I know that people believe what you believe. Not, not like there's Santa Claus. But (laughs) that if you are doing something with confidence and authority, people think that's right. I know all this, and I've practiced it. And I can do it. But I have also spent a lot of teaching years not really believing that I would make the right decision in the moment and therefore not sort of portraying a lot of command and a lot of authority.

### **A More Fluid and Dynamic Perspective**

The preceding section paints a portrait of a teacher characterized by a multidimensional experience of confusion and uncertainty in her own decision making. To stop there would, however, be misleading because the portrait is a largely static one

and is therefore inaccurate. In talking with Mary, I was interested not only in how she thinks about her present experiences of teaching, I deliberately explored how she locates these experiences in the course of her life. Discussing previous aspects of her career, I hear the ways that her current understandings represent achievement and new capacities that have been born out of past struggles and challenges. I also became attuned to the ways she continues to change, and in these stories, I hear a sense of hopefulness, a new way of regarding her own knowing.

Mary believes that her confidence and assurance in her decision making grows as she gains more experience as a teacher. With each year, she feels “a little bit more confident, a little bit more relaxed.” She therefore predicts that her confidence will continue to grow in future years, as well and that she’ll feel less uncertainty as a result.

I think the uncertainty does diminish. I feel more confident in the moment, in the classroom with the kids. I think it’s diminished hugely, and it will keep diminishing.

She is less hopeful that the anxiety that comes with long-term planning will diminish, though. “Unless I’m teaching courses, all of which I’ve taught 5,000 times, and even possibly then, the anxiety is not going to go away. I think it’s a habit with me.” Interestingly, she does not single herself out for blame in having these feelings. “I think all teachers feel it,” she says.

What is most hopeful to me, however, is that Mary not only expects to feel less uncertainty, she also is aware of the ways that the uncertainties themselves can be valuable in and of themselves. As she makes clear, there is a part of her that degrades the ways she approaches decision making.

I guess I’m glad that I don’t have some sort of rigid sense of rules that have no meaning for me. I mean I guess I’m glad that I’m exploring and trying to

understand the situation and trying to be in the situation. That's all good. But it's too hard! (laughs) And you make a lot of mistakes and do a lot of stupid things. And I wish that I could, within a situation, be quicker on my feet and make a decision [and know] why I was making it in the instant.

And yet there is also a part of her that celebrates this same tendency to embrace uncertainty and even her own mistakes.

I have a friend who is a drummer, and he had just joined this band that felt pretty big time to him, at least compared to everything he had ever done before, and he was nervous. And [during] one of their first concerts, he made a really big mistake and felt hugely relaxed after that, like everything was much better because he had made his big mistake.

The bass player in the band said to him, "Don't worry. You'll make lots of mistakes, and they'll be good ones." And I guess after hearing him say that, after making the mistake and hearing him say that, it was like, "Oh, it's *about* the mistakes. You know? It's okay. It's static if there [aren't] mistakes. It's stagnant if there [aren't] mistakes. It's not alive and vibrant."

I think, yeah, to some extent, I do believe that if challenges aren't continuing to happen, and you're not continuing to be shakeable, then something is wrong. You're entrenched.

And so while Mary may experience moments of frustration and self-doubt as she struggles with the uncertainties she faces as a teacher, her awareness of this capacity for learning and growth that is also possible provides a more hopeful picture. She effectively provides a renegotiation of her stance toward her uncertainties, reframing them as central and essential to her teaching rather than as unnecessary and unwelcome.

## **Implications**

### ***Providing Better Institutional Supports***

Mary's ability to recognize this more affirmative relationship to her uncertainties raises questions about the types of supports she might need to continue to grow as a teacher and trust her ways of knowing. Mary herself points out the ways in which she does receive institutional and more personal assistance to help her think about her work.

In both interviews, she mentions that she has sought advice and help from the Coordinator of Student Services at the school and the Special Education Counselor. She describes both women as helpful because she has been able to rely on them for concrete and specific advice and also for more emotional and psychological support when she feels overwhelmed or unconfident. It is particularly important to Mary that she find others who will listen to her as she talks through a dilemma or uncertain situation she faces.

You know, the most helpful thing is... talking about it out loud and sort of processing it aloud. ...It's always been my best way to functioning – to bounce [ideas] off someone else. I'm not a journaler. And I'll ponder and think about something and lie awake. But it's usually five times more fruitful to sit across from someone and spew. [When I do this I] get ideas, [and] it's usually really productive. [As I'm talking,] the ideas come from me. I just think best aloud.

During our interviews, as Mary described a difficult situation she was facing, she would actually come up with new and promising ideas about how she would like to handle the situation. She also remembers ideas that have already come to her previously but which she had forgotten. By stating them out loud, she seems to suggest that she'll be more likely to remember the ideas and to follow through on them. "Now that I said it aloud, I'll do it!" "This is good," she tells me. "This is problem solving at work."

Recognizing the value of having teachers work collaboratively, Harrison does provide large chunks of time for teachers to meet and plan curriculum, and Mary participates in many of these meetings. Unfortunately, there are many subjects to cover and decisions to be made in these meetings, and so Mary feels that "there's not enough time for [talking] at this school ever. There usually isn't, anywhere." Furthermore, the style of other teachers' thinking may actually add pressure to Mary, increase the doubts she feels about her teaching and decision making. For example, when other teachers



want to routinize and homogenize the team's lesson planning process, Mary faces some pressure to act as a team member, to conform to others' preferred ways of knowing, and to agree to work as they do.

Finally, Mary's expertise in dance and with an artistic way of knowing does not seem to be utilized extensively. While she does have the opportunity to propose new ideas for classes and to be on the edge of her learning, it seems that teaching subjects in which she is not an expert also creates a kind of pressure and stress for her as a knower and decision maker. From this perspective, the lack of opportunity she has to teach dance seems unfortunate.

### *Dimensionalizing Our Conception of Teacher Thinking and Decision Making*

If it is the case that teachers who prefer connected knowing have very different approaches to their teaching and decision making, further exploration of these differences can have important implications for teachers as well as for educational research, teacher training and professional development. And Mary's descriptions of her own experiences suggest ways that much of the research on and teacher preparation about these issues may be too narrowly focused.

For example, when all teachers are trained and expected to use formulaic models (such as those Mary refers to) for lesson planning, teachers who are connected knowers may experience these tools as detrimental to their best teaching. While fixed and mechanistic formats may provide guidance and helpful scaffolding, these same features may also stunt teachers' more innovative and fluid thinking. Exploring the different ways that teachers, especially those who prefer connected knowing, might feel most

supported and they prepare for their teaching can provide us with better information about how to add greater dimension to these models.

A connected orientation toward knowing also challenges our understanding of how different teachers engage in reflective practice. This process, intended to promote teachers' development and lead to improved practice, has often been described in a way that places separate knowing at its center. For example, Osterman and Kottcamp (1993) see reflective practice as an opportunity to "become the critic watching our own actions on stage. We stand back from the experience itself, assume a more detached stance, and step outside the action to observe it critically and to describe it fully" (p. 24). While this stance might feel most comfortable for and helpful to separate knowers, it may actually serve a more silencing and paralyzing role for connected knowers.

Needless to say, standing back and taking a critical stance to ideas can be proper and welcome; it can also be inappropriate and even, in some circumstances, destructive.... Separate knowing, with all of its doubting, can harm those who lack confidence in their abilities to develop and articulate ideas. When the germ of an idea is just beginning to develop, doubting can bring about stillbirths even for the most accomplished thinkers (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 88).

In fact, it may be the case that connected knowers are better helped by silencing their internal critics and voices of self-doubt (Clinchy, 1996). An investigation of the ways that connected knowers reflect and grow as teachers might therefore reveal very different processes and forms development.

I want to be clear about what I am proposing here. I do not mean to suggest that models of teacher thinking and decision making that rest on more separate types of knowing are without value, or even that they are necessarily inappropriate for teachers preferring connected knowing. It is important to emphasize that many people do *not* make use of only one orientation, to the complete exclusion of the other.

I do not mean to suggest that [separate and connected knowing] are mutually exclusive. “Separate knowers” and “connected knowers” are fictional characters; in reality the two modes can and do coexist within the same individual (Clinchy, 1996, p. 207)

Instead, individuals may tend to exhibit preferences for one orientation over the other, may feel most comfortable with and trusting of one mode.

Furthermore, Belenky and her colleagues (1986) suggest that as some women move beyond procedural knowing, they recognize the advantages in being able to develop and integrate both connected and separate approaches to knowing, to “find a place for reason *and* intuition *and* the expertise of others” (p. 133). It may also be particularly important for women who have experienced exclusion and de-valuing to develop the skills for more critical and separate types of knowing that can enable them to be suspicious of and guard against particularly toxic messages. Connected knowers may be best able to develop and exercise these forms of knowing when their own preferences are well-supported and respected.

These capacities develop most fully in communities where every voice gets heard, where people’s stories are listened to with great care, and where their visions, struggles, and strengths are well documented. This enables groups to take their critiques forward, forge common goals, and engage in action projects that have the potential of transforming whole communities as well as the people involved. (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 99)

As teacher educators and school administrators consider the ways they can help teachers grow in their practice, listening to the stories of connected knowers may provide new and valuable insights.

### **A Final Note**

Throughout this paper, I’ve taken a particular stance toward Mary’s decision making. That is, as a researcher, I have deliberately chosen to *explore* the ways Mary

thinks, rather than to *evaluate* the quality of her practice according to some personally- or externally-generated criteria. I have assumed that there is a coherence and wholeness to her ways of knowing, that the particular coherence and wholeness of her thinking has a certain reason and logic to it. In doing so, I have deliberately refrained from taking a number of different stances – that Mary’s way of thinking is unsuitable to teaching; that certain ways of knowing can be correlated with better decision making and practice; that teaching is a profession that should celebrate particular ways of knowing over others. My stance has therefore been one of connected knowing, an approach that has helped me to understand the complexity, commitment, and struggles of another rather than to form judgments about them.

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